

“PUTTING IN THE COAL”



A resident of Glyn Terrace, Tredegar, 'puts in coal' - late 1970's – Photograph: Derek Harding.

Before the introduction of gas, oil and electric central heating, coal was the primary domestic cooking & heating fuel. Arriving at a local station by railway truck, it was then loaded into coal-merchants' horse-drawn carts or open-backed lorries for delivery to homes. For many years sacks were rarely used, most coal being dumped in ton or half ton loads directly onto front streets or rear lanes, from where it had to be carried in buckets to a back-yard 'coal cot'. Front road dumping entailed numerous journeys through the entrance passageway, sitting room and kitchen, often over floors covered with strips of old carpet or linoleum to provide some protection. Putting in coal was a tiring and dusty task usually performed by wives and children who would afterwards have to carry buckets of water to wash down street or lane: even when delivery by sack became normal, this process still soiled houses and environment. The delivery shown here was fortunately of small pieces, easier to manage than loads containing lumps so large they had to be broken to fit into buckets.

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